

# Lombok Islamic Tourism Attractiveness: Non-Moslem Perspectives

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**Abstract**— Regional Government of Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (previously part of Lesser Sunda Islands) has declared the island of Lombok as an Islamic tourism destination. The aim is to keep the strong Islamic tradition in Lombok, and offer Lombok uniqueness with strong Islamic characteristic and background to the visitors. This new Islamic tourism branding is also to differentiate Lombok with Bali, which is perceived to be too western, despite its strong local culture. The Islamic tourism branding is also to attract Moslem visitors from both local and overseas as well non Moslem visitors to enjoy Lombok without having to leave Islamic way of life and for the host on welcoming and serving the tourists during the visit. This new branding however arises some questions; how the non-Moslems would response towards Lombok's Islamic tourism branding and what are the related potential issues and concerns. In answering the questions, a preliminary study was conducted using the qualitative approach through series of in depth interviews with several non-Moslem Indonesian informants who have strong interest on tourism. The results suggest there is an acceptance of Islamic tourism and the branding signifies for Indonesia as a Moslem country. Peace, inclusiveness and being universal are the potential key branding points for Islamic tourism in Lombok, with the island natural beauty and cultural heritages as the main attractions. However, there is a concern on misunderstanding of Islam as a religion, which emphasizes on strictness and restrictions. Yet, the issue could further be explored in future research.

**Keywords**— *Islamic tourism, tourism for non-Moslem, Islamic tourism characteristic, halal tourism supply chain, Lombok tourism.*

## 1. Introduction

Lombok Island is one of emerging tourism destinations in Indonesia. The location is justnext to the already well-established tourism destination, Bali Island. The difference with Bali is that

Lombok people have a strong tradition with Islamic culture, as the majority of people are Moslem. As there are growing concerns from the local community that tourism may destroy or diminish the local Moslem culture and tradition, the local government is therefore initiating some strategies to promote the island as a tourism destination and at the same time preserve the local culture and tradition. One of the strategies proposed by the local government at Lombok Island is to create and promote Islamic tourism. The achievement that has been made by Lombok Island is that it has been awarded as world best halal destination [1]. The strategy is also to differentiate Lombok from its neighboring rival of Bali Island. Lombok panoramic nature mostly is categorized as virgin, still untouched by too much modern development, except for road and some public infra structure, such as the airport. Lombok is also rich with local culture and wisdom, from culinary to natural beauty, something that the local government would like to preserve.

Islamic tourism concept has gained its growing popularity. This trend follows the concept of sharia in some aspects of economic activities, such as sharia banking, sharia finance, sharia economic, sharia capital market and many more. In Indonesia, Islamic tourism is known as Sharia tourism, and is a subcategory of religious tourism, which is geared towards Moslem families who abide the Islamic rules, or it is said as a Moslem friendly tourism [2].

The popularity of Islamic tourism appears also in non-Moslem countries such as Japan. Japan nowadays put huge concern on this issue, as they set Moslem friendly tour packages. For example, one of its tourism companies – Miyako International Tourist Co. Ltd. offers inbound halal tourism. “We understand the concern of Moslem travelers regarding halal food, praying facilities and all other aspects that fulfill our religious belief,” [3]. In addition, Russia has seen the potential of

halal tourism and attracts many Russian-speaking Moslems and tries to promote halal products in every annual fairs in the country, followed by China, French, Turkey, UEA, and any other parts of the countries who starts to realize the importance of Moslem travelers. Further, Malaysia has made efforts in positioning itself as an Islamic destination. As a matter of fact, Malaysia with its multicultural setting, cuisine, and heritage is already a worthy destination, but it needs further enhancement with respect to Islamic tourism [4].

Recent study indicated that that Moslem tourists globally represent a major niche market worth \$126.1 billion in 2011 growing at a 4.8% through 2020, compared to global average of 3.8%. In a challenging global economic environment, the study highlights how the integrated supply chain of airlines, tourism destinations and hotels/resorts could gain benefits by engaging with a market that has a young demographic, is growing in affluence, and is increasingly asserting its unique needs on the tourism industry. It estimates that from the global Moslem tourism market of \$126.1 billion in outbound expenditure is 12.3% of the total global outbound tourism expenditure in 2011. The Moslem tourists' spending is set to grow to \$192 Billion by 2020 representing 13.4% of the global expenditure [5].

Even though Islamic tourism has started to gain its popularity among non-Moslem, how they perceive Lombok as a Moslem-friendly tourism destination requires more understanding. Capturing their opinions is essential for the tourism supply chain and market sustainability. Therefore this research aims to understand non-Moslem attitude and acceptance towards Lombok Islamic tourism focusing on their knowledge, opinion and perception.

## 2. ISLAMIC TOURISM

Religion is an important factor that can help shape the culture, attitudes and values of society. Based on the Islamic understanding of God, man and nature, tourism is a part of religion and travel is fundamental in Islam. Based on the discussion of Hasharina (2006) travel is encouraged in order to lead a healthy life without stress, to establish and strengthen links across the Moslem community to expand knowledge of other cultures and to "reinforce subordination of the individual to God

through the knowledge of the beauty and abundance of his creations" [6]. However, although Islamic countries share the same religious beliefs, they are not necessarily homogeneous in many views and perspectives of lives. The situation arises from country to country and depends on the official interpretation of Islam and local culture, the role of local communities in society, the degree of liberalism and state interventionism [7].

Islamic tourism is a new tourism destination in the world today. There are 54 Moslem countries in the world. Most of the countries situated in an important nerve point of the world. Due to the geographical and economic importance of Moslem countries, this tourism increases day by day. Islamic tourism will be famous in those countries as well as all over the world. Islamic tourism is not one type of tourism, in the case of secular tourism. This tourism would help to extend the prospects for intellectual investigation. Some scholars have been describing this tourism as religious tourism also. It is of two types: tourism through which a religious duty is performed, and tourism by which knowledge is recorded and quoted for wider dissemination. Should the aim of this be to obtain the Blessings of God, it would achieve another objective - and that is to attract tourists. Islam has encouraged tourism for the faithful in the practice of life's affairs and to obtain experience and maturity. For instance, Moslems from Andalusia to China, India, Persia and Turkey to Indonesia have traversed the earth by the orders of God, both in search of work and to acquire knowledge [8].

Contrary to popular public opinion, Islam accepts and encourages tourism. There are 16 verses in the Qur'aan that directly encourage Moslems to travel. Moslems are taught to talk to God as fully as possible since through one's personal experience of the world one can understand the greatness of God and smallness of man. Travel results in the acquisition of knowledge and tests the patience and the perseverance in the individual [6]. Tourism is related to various aspects of Islam. Several researchers have given emphasize on how Islam is supported in different tourism activities to enhance religious and social functions.

Further, the categorization of tourism related goods and services that are designed, produced, and presented to the markets could be considered under Islamic or Halal tourism. Such use of terminology

is already common in daily usage for example halal trips, hotels, airlines, food etc. The concept of Halal, meaning permissible in Arabic, is not just being applied to food, but it includes any Sharia compliant products ranging from bank dealings to cosmetics, vaccines and in this case, tourism. This means offering tour packages and destinations that are particularly designed to cater Moslem needs. As such, countries around the world should start tapping into the unexploited Islamic tourism market by ensuring that Moslem travelers are provided with maximum convenience during their trip and are able to practice religious obligations while on holiday [2].

The concept of Halal, meaning permissible in Arabic, is not just applied to food, rather it includes any Sharia compliant products ranging from bank dealings to cosmetics, vaccines and tourism. In tourism, this means offering tour package and destinations that are particularly designed to cater for Moslem considerations and address the Moslems needs. Islamic or Halal tourism, as a form of religious tourism, is commonly associated with Moslem countries when it comes to travel, thus offering great potential for halal tourism products and services [9].

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative approach, aimed to explore knowledge and opinion from non-Moslems on their attitude and acceptance towards Lombok Islamic tourism. Two types of data were obtained. First, primary data was collected through series of in depth interviews with selected non-Moslem informants. Second, the secondary data was obtained from varieties of sources such as publications and reports. The informants were from different religion background: Buddha, Catholic, Christian and Hindu. All have graduate or tertiary education background. The nature of this research is exploratory type. The interview transcription was then analyzed and interpreted carefully to get red lines and connections from variety of opinions. Framework analysis suggested by [10] was used when analysing the data.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic tourism is one of the most important resources particularly in Moslem countries which have a rich and diverse heritage. This permanent

wealth and treasure have attracted Moslem visitors throughout history and will also attract hundreds of non-Moslem. It is important that Islamic tourism must be respectful to Islamic values and human beings in light of Islam. Human beings can be affected by depression and travel may be the best way to remove it. When tourism will discover the traditions and cultures of any country, then it considered great attractive to the visitors. Islamic tourism is a powerful weapon to meet the attraction of visitor religious fulfillment [8].

Based on results, there are some similarities on informants' thoughts and opinions on Lombok Islamic tourism. Positive opinion is a common mainstream. Informants are positive about the concept of Islamic tourism. However, alert are being arisen also as to the sensitivity of non-Moslem tourists who would like to enjoy their time based on their own values and beliefs. For example the free life style may not be a privilege to get at the area. Therefore, if the concept of Islamic tourism can offer a unique value proposition, this limitation may be reduced. In other words, the natural beauty of the place, unique tradition and customs, culinary excellent and unique local art performances could be promoted too for inclusive tourism experience.

Another finding is that informants do not show any sign of fear of radicalism towards the branding of Lombok as a Moslem tourism destination. They believe their security will be protected and they will be well taken care off, as long as they obey the local habits and culture. Positive opinion showed by all informants that the Islamic tourism will be good for them too as it will keep them safe. Interestingly, they perceive for a chance in experiencing different and unique tourism opportunities.

In addition, there were views on how significant Lombok would be as a Moslem-friendly tourism destination for tourists with strong Islamic background, such as tourists from the Middle East or South East Asia who would like to enjoy their vacation that offer halal ready product and services. Hence, there are concerns on making sure that the food is halal, the hotels and accommodations are halal friendly and able to provide all the means for praying, no alcoholic drink nor drug abuse. Similarly, the local government should emphasize on the men-women

relationships, which have to be based on marriage when they book the same room and no any entertainment performance against Islamic rules.

Similarly, as Lombok is offering Moslem-friendly tourism services, the informants believe it has a huge potential for Moslems who would like to experience beach and water activities without scarfing on the clothing adherence. Unlike some western countries that impose strict water activities clothing policy, Lombok will allow for sharia compliance clothing. With clothing perceived as a barrier, the informants feel that Islamic tourism can be a segmented marketing effort targeting at specific tourists from Islamic countries such as Middle East, especially when regional unrest in the Middle East prevents those people to travel within region. Safer country like Indonesia can be an alternative. Likewise, past research indicated the time of unrest in this part of the world has brought a need for local travelers to stay within the same cultural environment when making choices for their holiday destination [6].

Besides, the prospects and potentials of the Middle East tourists have been discussed in past research work. Middle East importance for global stability is derived from its immense oil reserves and its status as the epicenter of Moslem culture. The majority of their demand for tourism originates from neighboring countries. The time of unrest in this part of the world has brought a need for local travelers to stay within the same cultural environment when making holiday destination choices [6].

In general, although Islamic tourism best fit for the Moslem tourists, the uniqueness and distinct identity are the best traits to attract non-Moslem tourists. However, the challenge is to position the uniqueness of the genuine destination for offering the best value for non-Moslem tourists for inclusive tourism experience.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Islamic tourism may best fit for Moslem tourists. However it has high potentials for attracting non-Moslem tourist for unique experience. The preliminary results of the study indicates that Indonesian non-Moslem have a positive attitude and acceptance towards Lombok as an Islamic tourism destination. As a whole, they agree not

only the branding is good for them, but it would be significant to Indonesia too. They believe the concept has a good value proposition in offering real genuine attractiveness to explore. Interestingly, the fears that Islamic tourism is closely related to too much strictness, restriction and prerequisites or arising radicalism do not appear at all. In contrast, they believe Islamic tourism is about peace, inclusive and universal, as the aim of the visit is to enjoy Lombok's natural beauty and the unique cultural heritages. This is a new value for them and unique. The value is experiencing the difference with other destination, and further they even feel protected. It is believed that Islamic tourism will lead to a better and peaceful atmosphere at destination.

In essence, the study is significant in assisting the local authority and tourism department in preparing for better tourism strategies, planning and implementation. As tourism is inclusive and requires integrated supply chain and operation from multi parties, future research should be conducted to evaluate the qualities of the chains of services, for instance from the hotels and accommodations to local unique food and cuisines.

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